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THE ENDOGENOUS AND THE EXOGENOUS IN SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Anouar Abdel-Malek. *Social Dialectics*. (2 volumes. Volume 1: *Civilizations and Social Theory*. Volume 2: *National and Revolution*). Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981.

Anouar Abdel-Malek's *Social Dialectics* is a two-volume work that consists of many loosely related essays, all of which have been previously published by the author over a considerable period of time. Reading this work was a chore for many reasons. First, the essays in many cases bear only a very marginal relationship to one another. They range over such diverse topics as "The Future of Social Theory," "Orientalism in Crisis," "Joseph Needham: Encyclopedist of Civilizations," "The Army in the Nation," "Marxism and National Liberation," and "East Wind: The Historical Position of the Civilisational Project." Second, the writing style is ponderous and frequently obscure, something we have come to expect of works originally written in French (as this one was). (The following example of Abdel-Malek's frequent jargon is as good as any [volume 1, p. 156]: "In other words, the depth of the historical field is the face of the concept of time that is seen when one grasps the maintenance and the density of social dialectics in the history of human species." What this actually means I can only guess at). Third, the work is essentially a *programmatic* effort. Abdel-Malek continually tells the reader in very general terms what we should be studying and how we should be studying it, but there is precious little flesh put on these bare programmatic bones. One searches in vain for a concrete application by the author of his own guidelines. Finally, it must be said that there is not much, if anything, really new here. Even when Abdel-Malek has some interesting and valuable things to say, it is quickly recognized that these same points have been made by others, often to far greater effect.

If there is any single thread that runs through *Social Dialectics*, it seems to involve what might be called the *dialectic of the internal and the external*. Abdel-Malek insists that there are two great circles of social space. The first, which he calls *endogenous social dialectics*, consists of struggles

between classes and other social groups that go on within the confines of a particular society or nation-state. The other circle of social space is *exogenous social dialectics*, which consists of the struggles between and among nation-states, cultural spheres, and civilizations. This distinction between the two kinds of dialectics leads the author to two guiding hypotheses:

1. These two dialectical spheres make up two constituent poles of a dyad which is structuring social dialectics in the contemporary era, and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future.

2. The conjunction of the two circles during a given historical period is capable of producing great social transformations.

Abdel-Malek spends considerable time developing different versions of a typology that he believes will be useful for comparative sociological study. In the most elaborate version of his typology, we encounter three social categories. From the most to the least encompassing, these are as follows:

I. *Civilizations*, of which there are fundamentally only two, Indo-Aryan civilization, and Chinese civilization.

II. *Cultural areas*, which Abdel-Malek defines as "societal ensembles sharing a common *Weltanschauung*" (volume 1, p. 163). There are many cultural areas under each civilizational circle. One way of categorizing them is as follows:

A. *Indo-Aryan civilizational circle*: Egyptian, Persian, Mesopotamian antiquities; Greco-Roman antiquity; Europe; North America; parts of the Indo-European cultural area in Latin America; sub-Saharan Africa; the Arab-Islamic and Persian-Islamic cultural areas.

B. *Chinese civilizational circle*: China proper; Japan; Mongolia-Central Asia; the Indian subcontinent; Oceania (not counting Australia and New Zealand); the Asian-Islamic cultural area (from Persia to the Philippines).

(Abdel-Malek then proceeds to tell us that there is, presumably, a better way of classifying civilizations and cultural areas. The two broad civilizations are those of East and West, of Orient and Occident. Under Oriental civilization we can place the following cultural areas: Chinese civilization and its cultural areas; the circle of Islam; parts of the Indo-European cultural area of Latin America, specifically Brazil and the Caribbean; and sub-Saharan Africa. The West is then made up of the other major sections of Indo-Aryan civilization).

III. *Nations* ("*national formations*"), of which there are five types:

A. Fundamental (renascent) nations (Egypt, China, Persia, Turkey, Vietnam, Mexico, Morocco).

B. The European, then Western, type of nation-state.

ox C. New nation-states heading toward unification, including both new nation-states strictly speaking (e.g., Ethiopia, Ghana, Burma), and national formations within states (e.g., Armenia and Georgia within the USSR).

D. The dualistic Indian, then European, nation-state, mainly in Latin America.

E. The new states with a national vocation, mainly in several parts of sub-Saharan Africa and portions of Central and South America.

Abdel-Malek is much interested in social transformations of a very broad type. He rejects any simplistic or crude evolutionism. As he tells us (volume 1, p. 152):

The myth of a development progressing by continuous leaps yields its place, in many cases, to the hypothesis of the development of underdevelopment. The unilinear, continuous conception of social progress and evolution of nations begins to fade, and gives way to a dialectical, contradictory and conflictual conception of the evolution of human societies, an evolution which must often confront breakdown, deep crisis, even regression—a stormy diachrony.

In an essay on imperialism in the second volume, Abdel-Malek insists that the future of social and political theory lies in the scientific study of international power relations. This general point is pursued in more depth later in the same volume. Here Abdel-Malek speaks of what he calls the “hegemony of the endogenous, internal dimension of social dialectics over the exogenous, external dimension” (volume 2, p. 174), which he believes we have been witnessing for over a century. What he seems to mean is that social scientists have been preoccupied with endogenous social dialectics. But because of the existence today of a macro-phenomenon that Abdel-Malek calls the *globalization of the world*, the previously neglected exogenous social dialectics must be given considerably more attention than it has received. He writes (volume 2, pp. 182-84):

The globalisation of the world has been realized and achieved, and is maintained by the extension of political hegemonies based in the major world centres of production, military power and political and cultural influence. . . . Globalisation . . . is an objective process in world history at the present stage of development of the productive forces and political, scientific, and technological and cultural systems. . . . The very nature of this globalisation process entails the reassessment of social dialectics at a macro level, endowing the exogenous external dimension of that dialectics with a far greater and more significant weight than it has had previously, particularly compared with the nineteenth century. . . .

The inner, endogenous dimension of social dialectics—the structuring of these societies into classes and social groups, and the struggle between these classes and social groups for hegemony, within each society—functions as it would in any class society. It also functions, however, within the framework of a wider circle of social dialectics; it no longer has hegemony in determining the nature and direction of the social process. The efficacy of internal social dialectics must now always be co-ordinated with the dictates of its outer, exogenous circle.

Much of this seems to me eminently sensible, except that I would argue that the role of exogenous social dialectics did not emerge only in the twentieth century. Immanuel Wallerstein (1974a, 1974b) and other world-system theorists see the exogenous factor as being of tremendous importance as early as the sixteenth century, and some think Wallerstein himself starts too late (Schneider, 1977; Abu-Lughod, 1989; Chase-Dunn, in press). A number of social scientists, some of the members of the ISCSC, are now arguing for the relevance of an exogenist perspective in the study of precapitalist societies (cf. Chase-Dunn and Hall, in press).

In conclusion, Abdel-Malek makes some useful and interesting points in these two volumes, but few of them are original, and many have been developed far more substantially and interestingly by other scholars.

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